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Interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report highlights the activities carried out by key United Nations entities involved in the field of interreligious and intercultural dialogue and in the implementation of General Assembly resolution 63/22 and also provides an overview of other major regional and global initiatives taken in this field. It presents the outcome of consultations carried out by the Secretariat, in coordination with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), on the possibility of proclaiming a United Nations decade for interreligious and intercultural dialogue. The report should be read in conjunction with the annual progress report of the Director-General of UNESCO on the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World, 2001-2010.

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I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted in pursuance of General Assembly resolution 63/22, entitled "Promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace". It sets out the main activities carried out by the United Nations system in support of interreligious and intercultural dialogue since the adoption of the resolution and provides an overview of other major regional and international events in this field. The report also provides information on the outcome of the consultations carried out by the Secretariat, in coordination with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), on the possibility of proclaiming a United Nations decade for interreligious and intercultural dialogue, in pursuance of the same resolution.

II. Activities carried out by the United Nations system in support of interreligious and intercultural dialogue

A. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

2. Further to UNESCO resolution 34 C/46 adopted by the General Conference at its thirty-fourth session (16 October-3 November 2007) in which the General Conference expressed the hope that 2010 would be proclaimed the international year for the rapprochement of cultures, and the two related resolutions adopted by the General Assembly, 62/90 and 63/22, the UNESCO Executive Board, by its decision 181 EX/Decision 52, adopted in April 2009, invited the Director-General to elaborate an action plan to prepare the celebration of the year and called upon all Member States to contribute extrabudgetary resources to fund the action plan.

3. Accordingly, the Director-General sent a circular letter on 15 May 2009 to all Member States, intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations having official status at UNESCO as well as to other privileged partners inviting them to take part in the activities planned for the year. They were asked, in particular, to contribute to the drafting of the action plan, which should have a dual objective: to raise the awareness of the international community of the virtues of diversity and intercultural dialogue, using specific examples to show that all cultures and civilizations derive from and feed into each other; and to fight for human rights and against new forms of racism and discrimination. Attention was drawn to the fact that the plan should:

(a) Adopt a holistic approach incorporating those of other agencies in the United Nations system, States and intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs);

(b) Take advantage of the experience of UNESCO in the field;

(c) Promote positive examples and original projects, in particular on the occasion of political and cultural events, at the national, regional and international levels;

(d) Launch an appeal to raise extrabudgetary funds to finance relevant projects.

4. A draft of the action plan will be considered by the UNESCO Executive Board at its 182nd session, in September 2009, and by the General Conference at its thirty-fifth session, in October 2009. The exercise is coordinated by the UNESCO Culture Sector, in close cooperation with the other programme sectors — Education, Natural Sciences, Social and Human Sciences, Communication and Information — thus ensuring the necessary intersectoral approach.

5. In the area of interreligious dialogue, recent and ongoing UNESCO activities include:

(a) The annual meeting of the University Twinning (UNITWIN)/UNESCO Network of Chairs on Interreligious Dialogue for Intercultural Understanding, held in Oregon, United States of America, from 9 to 12 May 2009;

(b) A workshop on the theme "Christianity and Islam in the context of the contemporary culture", on 2 and 3 June 2009, by the UNESCO Chair in Comparative Studies of Spiritual Traditions, their Specific Cultures and Interreligious Dialogue, Saint Petersburg, Russian Federation, in partnership with the UNESCO Chair for the Comparative Study of Religions, Mediation and Dialogue at St. Joseph University, Beirut, with the support of the UNESCO office in Moscow and Beirut;

(c) A seminar on interreligious dialogue and spiritual traditions, held at the UNESCO office in Dakar on 8 and 9 June 2009;

(d) High-level participation (Chairperson of the UNESCO Executive Board) in the third Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions in Astana, 1 and 2 July 2009;

(e) The preparation of a study by an interregional and interfaith youth team, coordinated by Arigatou International under the overall supervision of UNESCO, with a view to engaging new voices in dialogue about religious issues. The study, to be submitted in November 2009, will identify existing practices for interfaith dialogue by and for youth. A similar study is under way to identify practices in the area of interfaith dialogue by and for women in East Africa. The scope of this research on women will be extended to other regions in 2010;

(f) A youth workshop, as a side event of the Parliament for World's Religions foreseen in December 2009 in Melbourne, Australia. The workshop will discuss Arigatou International's report on youth practices in interfaith dialogue and enable the drafting of a plan of action for the reinforcement of youth leadership for interfaith dialogue.

B. Alliance of civilizations

6. During the process under review, one of the key priorities of the Alliance was to ensure the success of the Second Forum of the Alliance, convened in April 2009 in Istanbul at the invitation of the Turkish Government, and to provide a mechanism for implementing the projects that were launched at the Madrid Forum.

7. Significant efforts were made towards consolidating the Alliance's three pillars — Governments, international organizations and civil society — and reinforcing its main building blocks. The steady enlargement and consolidation of the Group of Friends and the development of a global network of civil society

organizations allowed the Alliance to advance its objectives in three main directions, namely the inclusion of the Alliance's goals in national agendas through the implementation of national plans for intercultural dialogue, incorporating the Alliance into regional processes to create synergies and leverage work already under way and engaging civil society in joint activities under the auspices or the lead of the Alliance.

8. Support for the Alliance of Civilizations continued to grow significantly with an increase of 21 per cent in membership, thus bringing the number of members of the Group of Friends from 85 to 103. At the encouragement of High Representative, Jorge Sampaio, members of the Group of Friends have appointed focal points mandated with overseeing the implementation of national plans and coordinating with the Alliance secretariat. Since the beginning of the reporting period, 69 focal points have been appointed by countries and 14 by international organizations. At the Istanbul Forum, 10 countries announced their national plans: Albania, Algeria, Argentina, Brazil, Montenegro, Portugal, Qatar, Romania, the Russian Federation and Slovenia.

9. The Alliance continued to expand and deepen its network of partners. At the Istanbul Forum, the Alliance signed new agreements with seven international organizations with a view to leveraging networks and competitive advantage with its partners. The Alliance further established platforms for cooperation with two important constituencies: foundations and the private sector. Following a commitment made in Madrid, the group decided to create an international network of foundations. With regard to the private sector, the Alliance partnered with the United Nations Global Compact to launch a publication on the innovative role played by the business sector in managing cross-cultural diversity in the workplace and across communities, entitled "Doing business in a multicultural world: challenges and opportunities".

10. The Alliance also focused its efforts on implementing and consolidating programmes and projects that were launched at the Madrid Forum in January 2008 as well as on new initiatives that have been developed since then. The following review briefly describes initiatives including those in which the Alliance has a lead implementing role as well as those where it acts as a facilitator.

11. The Alliance's rapid response media mechanism was launched at the Madrid Forum. On average, between three to four news releases are sent per month to a constantly growing list of media contacts (currently over 7,000) to alert journalists about intercultural-related issues they might want to cover and offering names of experts prepared to comment on these issues. A partnership was developed with the European Commission and the Anna Lindh Foundation to develop a network of experts in the Euro-Mediterranean region to support the work of media professionals covering intercultural tensions and conflicts in this region.

12. Progress continued on the development of the Alliance's Media Literacy Education Clearinghouse (aocmedialiteracy.org), a comprehensive online database of organizations, resources and best practices that help combat cultural stereotypes and develop critical thinking skills to evaluate media messages, which has become an internationally recognized portal, with over 16,000 hits per month. In addition, the construction of the Education about Religions and Beliefs Clearinghouse has been completed (aocerb.org). This online resource provides access to guidelines and other educational resources about the world's diverse religions and beliefs as well as

education to ethics, tolerance and citizenship. In parallel to that work, a Research Network is being developed by the Alliance, bringing together a small group of institutions from around the world that are committed to encouraging cross-cultural educational exchanges.

13. Preparatory work was also conducted in early 2009 on an Alliance Fellowship Programme, designed to facilitate exposure of emerging leaders from North America, Europe, and Muslim-majority countries to media, culture, politics, institutions, civil society and religion to one another's countries. The project, which was announced in Istanbul, will become operational in the second half of 2009.

14. The pilot phase of the Youth Solidarity Fund was carried out as planned. Seed funding was provided to outstanding youth-led initiatives that promote long-term constructive relationships between young people from diverse cultural backgrounds. After analysis of the lessons learned, the next phase of the programme should be launched on a wider scale in late 2009. In collaboration with youth partners, the Alliance developed a youth strategy, which includes a series of initiatives led by the Alliance on the contribution of youth to advancing cross-cultural understanding. Launched at the Istanbul Forum, the Global Youth Movement of the Alliance aims to mobilize youth organizations and individuals and to strengthen commitment to the principles and activities of the Alliance. Moreover, construction of the youth website has been completed.

15. In the area of migration, which constitutes the fourth area of work identified in the report of the high-level group, preliminary plans have been drawn up for a migration-integration clearinghouse, in collaboration with the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Plural+, a youth-produced video festival on migration, inclusiveness, identity and diversity, was also launched with IOM and other partners at the Istanbul Forum.

16. Announced at the Madrid Forum, the Silatech ("Your connection") youth employment project, an initiative of Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al Thani and Sheikha Mozah bint Nasser Al-Missned of Qatar, is now fully operational. The project has established alliances with partners to promote job creation and enterprise development.

17. In Istanbul, the Alliance of Civilizations media fund, a related yet autonomous project, unveiled its three-part strategy, which includes conducting research to increase understanding of the impact of media on attitudes; raising awareness on the research findings through a global media-industry-targeted campaign; and producing and distributing content in film, television and new media that promote cross-cultural understanding.

18. In collaboration with the Alliance, Cisco Systems, Inc., launched a "Dialogue café" at the Istanbul Forum. Dialogue café links diverse groups of citizens from around the world through third-generation videoconferencing technology, thereby creating a new space for social innovation at the global level.

19. In the wake of the Gaza crisis, a cluster of projects was jointly developed by the Alliance and partner organizations. Named "Restore Trust, Rebuild Bridges", the initiative sets out a series of joint actions aimed at helping to restore trust in Euro-Mediterranean dialogue and to rebuild human and cultural bridges among societies in the region. The initiative, which involves the Anna Lindh Foundation, UNESCO, the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), the Council of

Europe, the European Commission and the Mediterranean Universities Union (UNIMED), among others, has received the support of several Governments.

20. Finally, the Second Forum mobilized a wide range of committed partners, from international organizations to the media. On 6 and 7 April 2009, more than 1,500 participants, among them several Heads of Government, over 50 Ministers and policymakers, foundations, media and grass-roots leaders from around the world, convened in Istanbul to forge new partnerships and generate ideas aimed at building trust and cooperation among diverse communities. The Forum also served as an opportunity to take stock of initiatives developed by the Alliance and to launch practical projects in collaboration with civil society and corporate partners. It included a "Marketplace of ideas", featuring some of the world's most exciting, innovative and lesser-known civil society projects aimed at advancing intercultural understanding.

21. The next forums of the Alliance will be held in Brazil, in May 2010, in Qatar, in 2011, and Austria, in 2012.

C. United Nations University

22. A research project conducted jointly by the United Nations University and the International Peace Research Institute, Oslo, resulted in the recent publication entitled "*World Religions and Norms of War*". The book examines religious teachings concerning the questions of when war can be justified and what methods and targets are permissible during war. It traces the evolution within the major world religions of attitudes and teachings related to the ethics of war, systematically exploring the historical roots and interpretations of norms within these traditions and linking them to the challenges of modern warfare. This reveals both harmonies and distinctions between the traditions, as well as the internal debates within each tradition, as they have responded to pressing moral challenges such as offensive and defensive war, the protection of non-combatants, asymmetric tactics, terrorism and weapons of mass destruction. The book was launched with a series of well-attended events at United Nations Headquarters in New York, the United States Institute of Peace in Washington, D.C., as well as in London and Oxford, where speakers included Archbishop Migliore, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations, and Dr. Bawa Jain, Secretary-General of the World Council of Religious Leaders. The book has been very well received by the academic, religious and policy communities, with over 400 copies sold in the first few weeks of publication.

23. The United Nations University and the University of Alberta, Canada, have organized an international conference entitled "Towards the Dignity of Difference: Neither the Clash of Civilizations nor the End of History", which is to be held on 3 and 4 October 2009. Distinguished participants include Tariq Ali, Benjamin Barber, Hamid Dabashi, Robert Cox and Hassan Hanafi. The conference will initiate a three-year research project, which is to result in an edited book and a special issue of a major academic journal. The project aims to examine the recent impacts and implications of the Western-centric discourse represented in Samuel Huntington's "Clash of Civilizations" and Francis Fukuyama's "End of History" theses. It also tackles the problem of radical extremism and counter-extremist strategies led by the United States by explaining the need for an alternative approach, a third way, that acknowledges the "dignity of difference" and promotes "dialogue among

civilizations". The project aims to challenge mainstream and ethnocentric discourse, to review current policy responses to radical extremism and to examine what the "dignity of difference" means in foreign policy terms.

24. The United Nations University and the University of Notre Dame, United States, have initiated a joint project on "Holy sites and ownership of religious property", with workshops in Rome (December 2008) and Jerusalem (December 2009). The project explores issues of religious property and visiting rights to holy sites through case studies on areas, including the Balkans, Jerusalem and the Vatican. Cooperation with UNESCO will be sought to disseminate the project outputs, including an edited book providing recommendations for potential amendments to national legislations.

D. United Nations Population Fund

25. During the period under review, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) accomplished significant strides in the mobilization and consolidation of regional interfaith networks for population and development. The UNFPA Global Forum on Faith-based Organizations for Population and Development (Istanbul, 20-21 October 2008), which brought together over 160 faith-based organizations and religious leaders from all major faiths and regions from over 50 countries, was a major contribution in the area of advocacy for the Millennium Development Goals and the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development. The theme of the consultations was the enhancement of the partnerships between faith-based organizations and UNFPA in areas of reproductive health, gender equality and population and development.

26. The Global Forum also drew together key partners from faith-based organizations from four earlier regional consultations on enhancing partnerships, held in Durban, South Africa, Kuala Lumpur, Cairo and Buenos Aires. The Forum culminated in the launch of the Global Interfaith Network on Population and Development, as leaders and grass-roots health-service organizations of Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and Sikh communities affirmed their common commitment to strengthen cooperation on human rights and development. The members of the Network are distinguished by the range of health services they provide to communities (in some instances, estimated to be between 30 to 65 per cent of basic health care), but also by their commitment to human rights and dignity. In Istanbul, members agreed on a terms of partnership with UNFPA, in what is termed the Istanbul Consensus.

27. Since the launch of the Interfaith Network, UNFPA has continued to amass lessons learned from its ongoing partnerships with faith-based organizations. African and Asia-Pacific regional interfaith networks have carried out a number of activities with UNFPA country offices on maternal health, census and migration issues. The UNFPA office in Guatemala has partnered with Georgetown University to map the role of faith-based organizations in the Latin American and Caribbean region's socio-economic development.

28. Bearing in mind the critical nature of the partnerships with the faith-based sector, and the complexities and specificities thereof, UNFPA produced a policy guidance note on engaging faith-based organizations as agents of change, which lays out the rationale, principles and terms of such partnerships. The guidance note was

sent to all 119 UNFPA country offices and shared with the focal points of faith-based organizations in related United Nations agencies.

29. The UNFPA flagship publication, *State of World Population 2008*, focused on intercultural approaches to development work. Entitled *Reaching Common Ground: Culture, Gender and Human Rights*, the report argues that culture is and always has been central to development and provides experiential insights for practitioners seeking "cultural fluency".

30. Another UNFPA publication, *Culture Matters: Lessons from a Legacy of Engaging Faith-Based Organizations*, maps partnerships at the national and regional levels between UNFPA and faith-based organizations in the areas of population and development and provides an analysis of best practices and lessons learned, including an annotated list of key resources in the broader culture and development field.

31. UNFPA, with the support of the Swiss Development Agency, also produced a training manual on culturally sensitive approaches to development programming, linked to the human rights-based approach, with a particular focus on gender equality. The manual constituted the basis for capacity-building training workshops for five United Nations country teams, in Jordan, Iraq, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Bangladesh and Brazil.

32. A set of sociocultural development indicators have been commissioned, which are relevant to the UNFPA strategic mandate. The indicators, designed according to UNFPA's 2008-2011 strategic plan, will be assessed in terms of their viability as part of UNFPA's overall monitoring and evaluation strategy and commitment to results-based management.

33. UNFPA also continued to take a lead role in facilitating and convening the informal inter-agency task force on faith-based organizations (including the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNESCO, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and UN-Habitat). The task force, which had earlier agreed to consult on ongoing partnerships with faith-based organizations, will assign members to speak to these respective groups during the Parliament of World Religions in Melbourne, Australia, in December 2009.

34. In May 2009, UNFPA participated in the first in-depth dialogue hosted by the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues to present its work with and in support of indigenous people and ethnic minorities in Latin America, the Caribbean and Asia, and to receive inputs from the Forum on how UNFPA should proceed programmatically in favour of these populations. UNFPA also organized two side events during the session.

35. On 3 and 4 August 2009, UNFPA convened international faith-based service providers for a policy round table in New York, the objectives of which were to provide an update on developments since the Istanbul launch of the Interfaith Network, to discuss and prioritize key recommendations for action and to agree on joint activities and modalities of engagement for 2009-2011. On 5 August 2009, UNFPA hosted a second meeting of the informal inter-agency task force on faith-based organizations to discuss possible joint efforts for follow-up on the

recommendations on partnerships with the United Nations made at the policy round table.

36. UNFPA continues to support several civil society initiatives, to endorse North-South collaboration among women of faith, to integrate efforts and to build bridges with non-faith-based development and human rights actors, aimed at advancing a culture of peace.

37. At the regional level, in September 2009, UNFPA will convene a regional consultation of faith-based organizations in Belarus, focused on Eastern Europe and Central Asia, where its fifth regional interfaith network will be launched. A mapping of faith-based organizations in the region is currently under way to analyse the support and position of faith-based organizations on various issues relevant to UNFPA. In October, UNFPA will conduct, with the Commonwealth Secretariat, a regional capacity-building training workshop on human rights for African faith-based organizations and traditional leaders in the United Republic of Tanzania.

38. At the country level, the UNFPA office in Lebanon will be conducting a mapping of all the faith-based organizations concerned with developmental programmes focusing primarily on youth, women, gender equality and reproductive health/HIV/AIDS-related areas. The UNFPA country office in the Republic of Moldova will also be collaborating with IOM on a joint initiative with the Alliance of Civilization, and others, around a youth festival on the theme of "migration, diversity, and identity".

39. By December 2009, UNFPA anticipates the production of several culturally relevant knowledge tools, including reports of the regional forums of faith-based organizations, the sociocultural development indicators and the results of a pioneering research on sociocultural factors which can positively influence the demand of sexual and reproductive health services.

E. Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS

40. UNAIDS has continued to promote interreligious dialogue through its work with faith-based organizations aimed at supporting a broad range of activities in partnership with people living with HIV. Global faith communities reach many millions of believers, and leaders of faith communities can therefore be particularly influential in speaking out responsibly about HIV. Through a network of partnerships and advisers, UNAIDS works to support the engagement of religious leaders and faith-based organizations in the AIDS response in over 70 countries.

41. In 2008, UNAIDS, in collaboration with UNFPA, hosted an initial consultation, including representatives from faith communities, people living with HIV and staff of the UNAIDS secretariat and co-sponsor partnerships, to develop a draft UNAIDS strategic framework for the engagement of religion and faith-based organizations in the response to HIV. This framework will be finalized in 2009 in line with the "Joint action for results: UNAIDS outcome framework for 2009-2011" and will guide the work of UNAIDS co-sponsors in scaling up partnership action with faith-based organizations to achieve universal access to HIV prevention, treatment care and support services in 2010.

42. In August 2008, UNAIDS engaged in an ecumenical pre-conference in Mexico City, D. F., ahead of the International AIDS Conference. UNAIDS led a workshop

for faith-based organizations in collaboration with the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance to develop strategic approaches to engaging faith-based organizations in the response to HIV. One practical outcome of the partnership with the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance in 2009 was a theological consultation on HIV prevention, resulting in the publication by the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance of a guide for faith groups on how to conduct dialogue on HIV prevention and a theological resource to enable Christian communities to grapple with HIV prevention in the context of their faith and beliefs.

43. In 2010, the International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures, UNAIDS, in collaboration with the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance, Cordaid and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, will organize a summit of high-level religious leaders in response to HIV.

44. In 2008, collaboration with the World Evangelical Alliance led to a strong statement from the Evangelical leaders on a bolder response to HIV. They committed to develop a comprehensive HIV strategy in collaboration with their member networks, people living with HIV and other partners. The elements of this comprehensive HIV strategy were outlined by a working group supported by UNAIDS in early 2009.

45. In partnership with UNAIDS, the national AIDS programme secretariat of the Ministry of Health in Guyana has intensified its collaboration with the Guyanese faith leadership. Faith leaders themselves have now taken the lead in developing a formal partnership (the "Guyana National faith-and-hiv Coalition"). This approach will guide consolidated faith leadership engagement in the area of HIV. The coalition is comprised of faith leaders from the five main religions in Guyana, namely Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Baha'i' and Rastafari.

46. UNAIDS supported a ground-breaking initiative by Hindu religious groups, whereby over 70 prominent faith leaders from across India came together to commit to incorporating HIV information into their religious education and training of future faith leaders, as well as including AIDS in their discourses, rituals and festival celebrations. Senior Hindu religious leaders agreed to join the national effort to reverse the spread of HIV at the first meeting entitled "Faith in Action: A Hindu leaders caucus on HIV/AIDS".

F. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

Durban Review Conference

47. The outcome document of the Durban Review Conference, adopted on 24 April 2009 (A/CONF.211/L.1) emphasized the critical importance of intercultural and interreligious dialogue as a means to prevent, combat and eradicate racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

48. The outcome document noted with appreciation the increasing number of initiatives to promote intercultural dialogue and affirmed the need to intensify engagement in a constructive and genuine dialogue rooted in mutual respect and understanding (para. 23). The Conference called upon States to implement cultural rights through the promotion of intercultural and interreligious dialogue and cooperation at all levels, especially at the local and grass-roots levels (para. 109). The Conference also requested the Human Rights Council to continue promoting

such dialogue with enhanced participation of all stakeholders, including from the grass-roots level.

49. The outcome document further took note of the proposal of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), in cooperation with regional stakeholders in all parts of the world, to organize, in light of the OHCHR expert seminar on the links between articles 19 and 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, a series of expert workshops to attain a better understanding of the legislative patterns, judicial practices and national policies in the different regions of the world with regard to the concept of incitement to hatred, in order to assess the level of implementation of the prohibition of incitement, as stipulated in article 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, without prejudice to the mandate of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Complementary Standards.

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

50. In an effort to contribute to the prevention and elimination of incitement to religious hatred and its negative consequences for the human rights of individuals and communities, on 2 and 3 October 2008, OHCHR organized an expert consultation on the links between articles 19 and 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in Geneva, under the title "Freedom of expression and advocacy of religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence", with the participation of 12 experts and over 200 observers, including from Governments, United Nations agencies, regional organizations, the media and non-governmental organizations (A/HRC/10/31/Add.3).

United Nations special procedures

51. On 22 April 2009, the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, Mr. Githu Muigai, the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Ms. Asma Jahangir, and the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, Mr. Frank La Rue, issued a joint statement in Geneva identifying challenges with regard to the dissemination of expressions which offend certain believers (A/HRC/12/38). In addition to legal responses to advocacy of hatred and violence, the Special Rapporteurs stressed the need to tackle the root causes of intolerance through a broad set of policy measures, for example in the areas of intercultural and interreligious dialogue or education for tolerance and diversity.

52. In its resolution 63/181 on the elimination of all forms of intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief, the General Assembly underscored the importance of a continued and strengthened dialogue among and within religions and beliefs at all levels and with a broader participation, including of women, and welcomed the work and the interim report of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief (A/63/161). Information on her activities and recommendations on interreligious dialogue are contained in her latest reports to the Human Rights Council (A/HRC/10/8) and the General Assembly (A/64/159).

G. Department of Public Information

53. The Department of Public Information has continued to promote and raise global awareness on issues relating to interreligious and intercultural dialogue through various types of activities.

Peace, tolerance and non-violence

54. The United Nations Regional Information Centre in Brussels co-sponsored, with the Istituto d'Istruzione Superiore, the fourth edition of an exhibition entitled "Fax for Peace, Fax for Tolerance", a collection of fax messages on peace and tolerance.

55. The Director of the United Nations information centre in New Delhi delivered the Secretary-General's message for the International Day of Non-Violence at a nationally televised multi-faith prayer meeting near the memorial that marks the spot where Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated.

56. The United Nations information centre in Moscow organized a special event and displayed an exhibition of paintings to mark the International Day for Tolerance. Speakers deplored the rise of extremism and advocated intercultural dialogue and defence of human rights. The Director of the information centre also outlined United Nations activities in the area of intercultural dialogue at the annual conference of the International Centre of the Roerichs, a non-governmental organization promoting dialogue among civilizations.

57. On 15 November 2008, religious, cultural and civil society groups gathered in Zinj, Bahrain, to mark the International Day for Tolerance under the theme "Tolerance is harmony in diversity". The Director of the United Nations information centre in Manama spoke about United Nations initiatives and delivered the message of the Secretary-General for the day.

58. The eleventh edition of the Immigrants Cup, a biannual soccer tournament organized by the Immigrants League of Brazil and the United Nations information centre in Rio de Janeiro in November and December 2008, included teams from the city's immigrant communities. The information centre promoted the event as part of its outreach efforts on dialogue among civilizations, using sport as a tool for development and peace.

59. In January 2009, in cooperation with IOM, the information component of the United Nations office in Ukraine organized an event aimed at engaging Ukrainian youth in an intercultural dialogue with representatives of national minorities to break stereotypes.

Bridge-building between Palestinians and Israelis

60. In collaboration with the Government of Austria, the Department of Public Information organized an international media seminar on peace in the Middle East in Vienna on 2 and 3 December 2008, with a focus on the role of neighbouring countries in the Middle East peace process. The 2009 media seminar, held in Rio de Janeiro in July, which was co-sponsored by the Department and the Brazilian Government, addressed the role of public opinion and the media in seeking peace in the Middle East.

61. The Department supports a partnership between Israeli and Palestinian local authorities, international non-governmental organizations and UNDP to install a major waste water project in Gaza. The stakeholders met in Jerusalem on 10 June 2009 to advance this confidence-building project aimed at improving the coastal environment for both communities.

62. In collaboration with the Institute for Global Leadership, the Department arranged a press conference at United Nations Headquarters in March 2009 with a former Palestinian fighter and a former Israeli soldier who are members of the Jerusalem-based organization Combatants for Peace. The two men, who lost close relatives during the conflict, are part of a movement of more than 600 former Israeli soldiers and former Palestinian fighters who have opted for peaceful means in order to end violence in the area.

Media outreach and publications

63. The United Nations News Centre provided coverage of a number of events, including the plenary meeting of the General Assembly on the agenda item "culture of peace", the second forum of the Alliance of Civilizations and the Asian Conference of Religions for Peace, which was held in Manila in October 2008. United Nations Television provided thorough coverage of the General Assembly's plenary meeting on culture of peace and packaged segments of the coverage for broadcasters through UNifeed. The wide-ranging coverage of these issues by United Nations Radio included news stories from the second forum of the Alliance of Civilizations and the plenary of the General Assembly.

64. The *United Nations Chronicle* has published two articles that touch upon human rights and religious and/or cultural understanding: "Women's Rights as Human Rights: The Promotion of Human Rights as a Counter-Culture", by Zehra F. Kabasakal Arat; and "Are Human Rights Universal?" by Navanethem Pillay. The United Nations Intranet site, iSeek, maintained by the Department of Public Information, featured an article on the Istanbul Forum. The Department also provided worldwide distribution of a number of publications issued by the United Nations that play an important role in promoting tolerance and dialogue, including *World Religions and Norms of War*, the *Human Development Report 2004: Cultural liberty in today's diverse world* and *Earth and Faith: A Book of Reflection for Action*.

Education and outreach

65. The Department organized a cultural evening and concert entitled "Breaking the Silence, Beating the Drum" in the General Assembly Hall in observance of the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade in March 2009. As part of the commemorative events, a global videoconference brought together high school students from Canada, Saint Lucia, Trinidad and Tobago, Sierra Leone and the United States of America. The students gave an overview of their countries' history and how it was linked to the transatlantic slave trade.

66. Other events included the screening of documentary films, followed by discussions with producers; a panel discussion on the legacy of the slave trade in modern society, which was held as an NGO briefing; and a special book event focusing on slavery.

67. Recent activities in connection with the International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust and the related outreach programme included three panel discussions on the linkage between the founding principles of the Organization and its mandated activities in the areas of Holocaust remembrance and genocide prevention; the seventieth anniversary of the Kristallnacht pogrom; and hate speech on the Internet, including Holocaust denial and cyber-bullying.

68. The Department launched an educational video, entitled "Footprints for hope", to communicate the lessons of the Holocaust to secondary school children through the examination of historical artefacts. Other commemorative events included: an NGO briefing on Sephardic Jews; a book signing with the Holocaust survivors' memoirs project; an exhibit on eugenics, "Deadly Medicine: Creating the Master Race", produced by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum; and a screening of the film "Watermarks".

69. Six United Nations information centres in French-speaking African countries, along with high school students and a Holocaust survivor, participated in a videoconference organized by the Department.

70. Paolo Coelho, United Nations Messenger of Peace with a focus on intercultural dialogue, recorded a public service announcement for UNESCO on the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and contributed a video message for a global seminar for the International Year of Languages, "Language Matters! Linguistic Diversity, Globalization and Development", co-sponsored by the Department and UNESCO at United Nations Headquarters in December 2008.

71. On 17 March 2009, the Department and the Sci-Fi Channel co-hosted a panel discussion at United Nations Headquarters in connection with the final episode of the Battlestar Galactica television series. The discussion, which involved the show's cast and creators along with United Nations representatives, explored themes that are important to the Organization and the critically acclaimed television show, including reconciliation and dialogue among civilizations and faiths.

H. Department of Economic and Social Affairs

72. Within the Department, the Office for ECOSOC Support and Coordination is mandated by General Assembly resolution 62/90 to interact with entities of the United Nations system on issues pertaining to intercultural and interreligious dialogue and to coordinate their contribution to the intergovernmental process. The Office will continue to act in this capacity during the sixty-fourth session of the Assembly, including in the coordination with relevant United Nations entities and the preparation of reports for the Assembly. In this context, the Office also carried out consultations on the consideration of the possibility of proclaiming a United Nations decade, as mentioned in Assembly resolution 63/22. The outcome of these consultations is presented in section IV below.

73. The Office has also been invited to make a presentation on the work of the United Nations in this field at various meetings, and sent a representative to a preparatory meeting to the Third Congress of World and Traditional Leaders in Astana. In its resolution 63/22, the General Assembly referred to the provision of support and technical assistance by the United Nations for that event.

74. The other entity of the Department making a direct contribution in this field of work is the secretariat of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in the Division for Social Policy and Development. The work of the Forum secretariat has been presented in detail in the report submitted to the Assembly at its sixty-third session (A/63/262, paras. 76-85).

75. In addition, the ninth session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, which is to be held in May 2010, will be of great relevance to efforts to promote intercultural dialogue. The main theme of the session is "Indigenous peoples' development, with culture and identity: articles 3 and 23 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples". Article 3 of the Declaration focuses on the right to self-determination, while article 33 enshrines indigenous peoples' right to determine their own identity and the membership of their institutions.

III. Overview of other major regional and global initiatives on intercultural and interreligious dialogue

76. In addition to United Nations activities, other regional and international actors took important initiatives aimed at promoting intercultural and interreligious dialogue. Some of these initiatives are presented below. Other major initiatives were undertaken since the plenary meeting of the General Assembly on culture of peace, on 12 and 13 November 2008, while others have been planned for the near future. It should be recalled that the Assembly benefited from high-level participation at that meeting, including the presence of King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud of Saudi Arabia, who presented the outcome of the World Conference on Dialogue held in Madrid in July 2008.

77. At United Nations Headquarters, the Tripartite Forum on Interfaith Cooperation for Peace has continued to organize regular meetings, one every second month on average, to exchange information and views on issues relevant to interfaith cooperation at the United Nations. Invitations were extended to United Nations entities, such as UNICEF and the Alliance of Civilizations, to brief the Forum on their work with faith-based organizations and their contribution to interreligious dialogue. The work of the Forum is steered by a troika, chaired by the Philippines and composed of UNESCO and the Committee on Religious NGOs at the United Nations.

78. The Council of Europe held its Conference of Ministers of Culture on the theme of intercultural dialogue as a basis for peace and development in Europe and neighbouring areas in December 2008 in Baku.

79. Intergovernmental activities are carried out on a continuing basis by the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue among Cultures. The Foundation is an integral part of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, a broad political agreement between the European Union and 10 partner countries south of the Mediterranean.

80. The Asia-Europe Meeting has continued to enhance the cultural and interfaith dimension of its work, with conferences and events on the promotion of cultural diversity as well as the holding of an Interfaith Cultural Youth Camp in Thailand in

February 2009 and its fifth Interfaith Dialogue in Seoul from 22 to 25 September 2009.

81. An International Conference on Dialogue of Civilizations and Cultural Diversity was held from 2 to 4 June 2009 in Kairouan, Tunisia, on the initiative of the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the International Organization of the Francophonie with the support of the Government of Tunisia. The declaration adopted as the outcome of the conference is a strong call for dialogue among civilizations and respect for cultural diversity.

82. The Third Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions was held in Astana on 1 and 2 July 2009. Attended by over 60 delegations of world and traditional leaders and high-level representatives of major international organizations, the Congress adopted an appeal that promotes interreligious dialogue, mutual understanding and solidarity (see A/63/918-S/2009/341). Kazakhstan also hosted a ministerial conference on "Common world: progress through diversity" on 17 October 2008 in Astana. The conference adopted the Astana Declaration, which calls for increased cross-cultural and inter-civilizational cooperation (see A/63/512-S/2008/677).

83. At a meeting held in Moscow at the initiative of Kirill I, Patriarch of Moscow and all the Russian Federation, religious leaders of the Christian, Jewish and Islamic Faiths adopted a communiqué in which they announced the establishment of a high-level consultative group of religious leaders in partnership with UNESCO.

84. A special ministerial meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement on interfaith dialogue and cooperation for peace will take place in Manila, the Philippines, from 1 to 3 December 2009. This will be the first time that the Non-Aligned Movement will harness the potential of interfaith dialogue and cooperation to advance common objectives.

85. The Parliament of the World's Religions, which brings together leaders and followers of the world's religious and spiritual communities to discuss peace, diversity and sustainability in the context of interreligious understanding and cooperation, will be in held in Melbourne, Australia, in December 2009.

86. The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia will organize the Second World Conference of Religions for Peace in 2010.

87. The Third Asia-Middle East dialogue, aimed at fostering mutual understanding between the two regions will be held in Thailand in 2010.

IV. Consideration of the possibility of proclaiming a United Nations decade for interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace

88. In its resolution 63/22, the General Assembly requested the Office for ECOSOC Support and Coordination to coordinate with UNESCO in facilitating the consideration of the possibility of proclaiming a United Nations decade for interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace. To comply with this mandate, the Secretariat, in coordination with UNESCO, carried out consultations aimed at gathering views from various relevant actors and being in a better position to assess the potential added value of such a decade and

the difficulties that this process may generate. The present chapter presents the outcome of these consultations.

89. The Office for ECOSOC Support and Coordination has liaised with the coalition of faith-based non-governmental organizations for the proclamation of a United Nations decade on interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace. The coalition of interfaith, faith-based and value-based organizations from various traditions and beliefs launched a process of reflection on a proposed decade in early 2008. At a meeting held at Ossining, New York, in March 2009, the coalition was officially constituted and the proposal for a decade formalized. The Office took part in that meeting and briefed participants on the role of the United Nations in the area of intercultural and interreligious dialogue, in particular the intergovernmental process at the Assembly. On 4 March, the Office sponsored a lunch-time briefing by the coalition at United Nations Headquarters aimed at briefing member States and civil society actors on the outcome of the Ossining meeting. The Office also facilitated interaction of representatives of the coalition with United Nations system agencies on the same day. For ease of reference, the proposal for a decade, as agreed by the coalition, is available on its website (http://faithdecadeforpeace.net/).

90. Consultations were also carried out with Member States who were invited to communicate their views on the matter in a note verbale dated 8 April 2009. A reminder extending the deadline for responding was addressed to all Permanent Representatives in New York on 26 May 2009. At the time of reporting, the Secretariat had received 23 responses from Member States: Bahrain, Belarus, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Chile, Colombia, Denmark, Egypt, France, Guyana, Indonesia, Mauritius, Morocco, the Netherlands, Peru, the Philippines, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Senegal, Switzerland, Thailand the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

91. The majority of responses received from Member States contained positive views on the proposed decade, which was generally considered to be a welcome initiative to enhance dialogue and understanding among cultures and religions. Countries expressed their commitment to the values of respect and tolerance that the proposed decade would promote at the international level and its potential contribution to fight against extremism. This initiative would also allow for sustainable actions in support of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, beyond the International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures in 2010.

92. It was proposed that, along with the proclamation of the decade, a plan of action be developed to establish the goals to be achieved and a calendar of activities, thereby guiding the work at the international and national levels towards concrete outcomes. It was also suggested that the decade should lead to promoting the adoption of relevant legislation by Member States, supporting institutions working in this field, creating a unit in each country in charge of these issues, establishing linkages between religious institutions and encouraging research.

93. Some Member States stressed the need to closely involve civil society and the mass media in the proposed decade as an effective way to promote the values of dialogue and tolerance in society.

94. Member States also expressed a number of concerns that should be taken into account when considering the proposal. These concerns refer to both the content of the initiative and the context and process through which this idea is developed.

95. Regarding the content, the role of the United Nations in the field of interreligious dialogue was considered by some as unclear or questionable, as such a dialogue is a matter of the individuals who engage in it or of the different religions and spiritual traditions themselves. The latter have developed a number of global institutions and instruments to that end. The role of governmental and intergovernmental institutions is therefore limited to enabling this dialogue to take place and to promote the appropriate educative and sociocultural frameworks that will allow individuals to successfully engage in it. In that regard, respect for human rights, including freedom of belief and expression, was stressed by some as a requirement for the realization of the dialogue.

96. Since interreligious dialogue is a dimension of the broader intercultural dialogue and the overall culture of peace, some Member States considered that further efforts should rather be placed under the broad framework of culture, instead of establishing a separate initiative on faith. It would also be necessary to ensure consistency and common understanding of the concepts of interreligious, intercultural and intercivilizational dialogue.

97. As for the current context and the process to follow, some Member States stated that the proposed decade should be considered in the context of United Nations and other international initiatives in similar fields, including the work of UNESCO, the Alliance of Civilizations and the Tripartite Forum on Interfaith Cooperation for Peace. Interlinkages and synergies should be sought among these initiatives, and sufficient space should be given to other initiatives within the proposed decade.

98. Full consideration of the content, objectives and expected outcomes of the decade were considered necessary before Member States can take action on the proposal. This would entail a review process of the accomplishments of ongoing initiatives. A proposal was also made to prepare a comprehensive study on the feasibility of the decade.

99. The view was also expressed that the multiplication of international events (four international years in 2010 and nine ongoing decades) had weakened their effectiveness and political visibility. Consequently, the designation of new international commemorations should be avoided and priority should be given to implementing concrete activities within existing events.

100. The issue of the costs generated by the proclamation of such a decade was raised, as was the need, in a difficult budgetary context, to focus on the core of the Organization's mandate.

101. Responses received by Member States, although limited in number, have confirmed interest in promoting peace and mutual understanding through dialogue. They have also revealed the need for further work before a broad and consensual mobilization on this proposal can be reached at the intergovernmental level. In this context, Member States may want to take the following considerations into account during their forthcoming deliberations at the General Assembly.

102. In the view of the Secretary-General, it is imperative to ensure coherence and coordination of similar activities within the United Nations system. Today, intercultural, intercivilizational and interreligious issues are considered in various forums and bodies in the United Nations system, a diversity that makes the issue difficult to approach for non-United Nations actors and which, overall, tend to decrease their visibility. It is therefore important to ensure that the proposed decade is connected to ongoing activities and complements them. As one international decade and one international year have already been proclaimed in this field, it would be wise to start by assessing their outcome and drawing lessons learned that would feed into future events. As the Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World ends in 2010, its final report would be a useful vehicle to highlight activities that could be continued in a follow-up mechanism. The results of the International Year on the Rapprochement of Cultures (2010) will also be useful in evaluating what can be achieved through this type of event. Its assessment should inspire potential follow-up celebrations, such as the proposed decade, and provide a clearer picture of actors to bring on board and of activities to carry out. The successive forums of the Alliance of Civilizations, which benefit from a high-level of support by Member States, should also be taken into account in this exercise.

103. A potential added value for the proposed decade would be to provide an umbrella for the activities carried out by this multiplicity of actors on a longer period of time. In that case, its focus should be broad and encompass the various dimensions of the issue, be they cultural, civilizational or religious. The title for the proposed decade might be modified accordingly. The ultimate objectives of the decade could also be broader than the search for peace and encompass the three pillars of the United Nations, namely peace, human rights and development. This explicit support for the overall goals of the United Nations might help broaden mobilization on this initiative.

104. Finally, the role of UNESCO and its expertise on these specific issues should be emphasized. Within the United Nations system, it is the unique agency with a specific mandate to deal with these issues on a large scale, with the solid support of staff and services specialized in issues related to culture. Any future initiative should therefore recognize the leading role of UNESCO in this field and its capacity to mobilize other United Nations actors.

V. Conclusion

105. The year 2010 will be a particularly rich year for intercultural and interreligious dialogue at the United Nations. The system will celebrate the International Year on the Rapprochement of Cultures, for which UNESCO is preparing a plan of action which could inspire follow-up mechanisms. It is recalled that at its sixty-fifth session, according to resolution 60/4, the General Assembly will also consider the follow-up provided to the agenda on the dialogue among civilizations. Given the multiplicity of initiatives taken at the international level to promote intercultural and interreligious dialogue and the need to avoid a fragmentation of activities, the Assembly may wish to request a consolidated report on these various initiatives to its next session and subsequently decide on action with regard to a United Nations decade for interreligious and intercultural dialogue.